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ABSTRACT

The fine and performing arts have long been a part of the two-year college curriculum, though the organizational structures of the colleges have afforded these courses limited visibility and widely varying roles within the curriculum. In 1987, a study was conducted by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges to determine the goals and characteristics of the students who participate in the fine and performing arts at community colleges. Study findings, based on responses from 1,079 students, included the following: (1) half of the arts students were aged 21 or younger; (2) 38% were employed for more than 20 hours per week; (3) 7.1% of the students were Hispanic, 4.0% were Black, and 3.3% were Asian; (4) 52% of the students were attending the community college "to prepare for transfer," 18% "to gain skills necessary to enter a new occupation," and 22% "to satisfy a personal interest"; (5) in comparison to a national sample of students taking all types of courses, the arts students were younger, more likely to be attending college to prepare for transfer or for their own personal interest, considerably less likely to be Black, and more likely to indicate that their experiences at college had affected them positively; and (6) though only a small percentage of students had been involved professionally with the arts before college, 38% expected that they would be deriving a significant portion of their income from a career in the arts within 5 years. (EJV)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE FINE AND PERFORMING ARTS

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The fine and performing arts have long been a part of the two-year college curriculum. More than half a century ago, Eells (1931) analyzed the catalogs of a national sample of 279 junior colleges and noted that 45% offered courses in art, including both art appreciation and studio art, and 57% offered music courses, including voice, harmony, history, and instrumental performance. A few years later, Colvert (1937) conducted a similar analysis and found 49% offering courses in art and 62% offering courses in music.

Later literature has focused on the limited visibility of the fine arts within the colleges' organizational structures, bringing into question the degree to which the arts have been accorded institutional acceptance. The Music Educators National Conference (1970) reported that only 19% of the nation's two-year colleges had separate music departments and that 50% had only one or two music instructors. As for drama, Marine (1974) argued that most theater faculty were usually subsumed (and hence lost) within English and speech departments.

The literature also suggests that the arts have been employed at community colleges for a variety of purposes. Buckner (1979) surveyed administrators responsible for fine arts programs at 40 urban community colleges, requesting information on the extent to which the arts played various roles in the curriculum. Responses from 30 colleges indicated:

- 21 of the 30 colleges offered an associate degree in the arts and 6 had developed certificate programs.
- 19 of the colleges indicated that their arts curricula were geared primarily for students who wanted to further their study of the arts at four-year colleges, but only 7 colleges reported that more than 50% of their students went on to four-year institutions.
- Half of the colleges indicated that all credits earned in their arts courses were transferable to local state colleges, while the other half indicated that most, but not all, credits were transferable.
- 14 colleges reported that they offered "occupational arts" programs, including commercial art and art-related business education.

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However, the existing literature has contributed little to our understanding of the people who enroll in fine and performing arts classes. Who are the students who attend college in order to further their interests in the arts? What distinguishes the academically oriented students from those who are attending for personal interest? What are their goals? Is age a factor?

In order to answer these and other questions, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (1987), under a grant from the Ford Foundation, surveyed 1,287 students in 78 colleges in spring 1987. Those students were enrolled in a random sample of 108 advanced classes in studio and commercial art, music performance, dance performance, and theatre and film.

Study findings, based on responses from 1,079 students, included the following:

- half of the arts students were aged 21 or younger
- the modal age of the students was 19 years
- 38% were employed for more than 20 hours per week, while 31% were not employed at all
- 7.1% of the responding students were Hispanic, 4.0% were Black, and 3.3% were Asian.

When asked to indicate their most important reason for attending "this college at this time," students responded:

"To prepare for transfer" (52%)

"To gain skills necessary to enter a new occupation" (18%) or "remain current/advance in a current occupation" (7%)

"To satisfy a personal interest" (22%)

Their most important reasons for attending their particular college was that it was close to home.

In comparison with a national sample of students taking all types of community college courses in 1986, the arts students differed notably in a number of respects. The arts students were:

- younger
- more likely to be in college to prepare for transfer or for their own personal interest
- considerably less likely to be Black
- more likely to indicate that their experiences while attending college had affected them positively.

Among the students taking advanced arts classes, 29% were majoring in art, 18% in music, 6% in theatre, and 3% in dance. Though significantly fewer students planned to continue to major in the arts after transfer (16% in art and 12% in music), many were optimistic about their future involvement in the arts. Although only a small percentage of students had been involved profes-

sionally with the arts before college, with most participating only as a hobby, 38% expected that they would be pursuing a career in the arts and deriving a significant proportion of their income therefrom within five years.

Of the **students who expected to make a career in an art field** after completing their education:

Over 50% were preparing to transfer to a four-year college or university and 19% were planning to attend a specialized institute or conservatory.

Many came to the community college because of a particular program, e.g., the studio arts program.

50% rated their abilities to understand art, classical music, and drama as excellent; 33% rated their ability to perform in dance, music, film, or theatre/drama production as excellent; and 50% rated their ability to create artistic works as excellent.

Prior to enrolling in college, 20% had occasionally sold art works, 5% each had performed as professional dancers in theatre or film, and 15% had performed music professionally.

49% reported it highly probable that they would be majoring in the arts.

66% felt it highly probable that they would be selling work or performing as professionals five years hence, while 39% suggested that their involvement in the arts would be as a hobby, 26% said they would participate as amateurs, and 36% thought they would be taking private lessons or classes.

The **over-35-year-old age cohort**, which comprised 20% of the total group of respondents, was also an interesting and, in some ways, distinctive subgroup.

In comparison to the under 22 and 22-to-34 year old age groups, more of the 35+ students were not currently employed (41%), were attending college to satisfy personal interests (46%), and were entering college because of a studio arts program (35%).

Many in this group tended to have been involved in the arts before entering college, occasionally selling work or performing as professionals (22%), or participating as a hobby (47%).

Among the 35+ age cohort, 48% reported a high probability that five years hence, they would be participating in art as a hobby, but only 26% felt that there was a high probability that they would be pursuing art as a career (compared to 39% of the under 22 year old group and 44% of the 22-to-34 year old group).

Over half of these 35+ students were attending colleges in the West.

The two subgroups of arts students -- those who plan to pursue a career in the arts and those over 35 years of age -- in some ways appeared to be contrasting groups. One was dedicated to arts careers and more intense in their involvement, while the other was pursuing personal interests. Yet both groups, despite their different characteristics, educational objectives, and aspirations, were served by the same community college arts courses.

These findings demonstrate that new measures of institutional functioning are needed to differentiate curriculum content from student intent. The contemporary community college cannot be understood without disaggregating the two.

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